

Shellfish Rules Changed to Protect the Bay

By SUSANNA SHEEHAN

Selectmen this week unanimously approved three changes to the shellfish rules and regulations that will offer better protection to both the public and the aquaculture grants in Duxbury Bay.

Shellfish grants are areas of Duxbury Bay on which oysters, little neck clams, quahogs and surf clams are raised from seed to maturity. Aquaculture grants can be three acres maximum. Between 50,000-100,000 shellfish seed are planted under plastic mesh on the mud flats in areas that must be barren of existing shellfish and eel grass, and cannot have had any historic shellfish activity on them.

The first change in the rules will require that aquaculture grants replace their corner boundary marker buoys with stakes. The stakes will be plastic poles that will be no higher than 18 inches above the water of the shellfish grant and have an attached sign stating that this area is a private grant. The signs will be visible at mean low tide only.

The second change

requires that all boundaries of the hard structures on the grants such as nets will be marked with six-inch orange sphere buoys every 25 feet. They will be tied off 36 inches from the top of the hard structure on the grant and will have the waterway symbol for danger on them. They will be visible only at half-tide or below. On most shellfish grants, the shellfish seed is placed in nets and is under water most of the time. The buoys marking the area are the only thing seen.

The purpose of these two changes is to address concerns about how the multiple buoys on the shellfish grants are affecting the aesthetics of the bay. Also, the changes will better protect the grants from boaters and the clearer markings should better protect the boaters from running afoul in the grant areas.

The third change is aimed to better protect the shellfish industry from disease possibly brought on by itself. The new rules state that an aquaculture grant holder must buy his or her shellfish seed or stock from hatcheries approved by the Duxbury Shellfish

grant holder must apply in writing for permission to buy seed and then the committee must approve or deny the request in writing in a timely manner.

The new rules state that an aquaculture grant holder must buy his or her shellfish seed or stock from hatcheries approved by the Duxbury Shellfish Advisory Committee.

The purpose of this change was to protect Duxbury's shellfish beds from disease. There is a virus that kills oyster seed. Known as Juvenile Oyster Disease, or JOD, this virus strikes when oyster seed from hatcheries is not placed in the bay at just the right time. Shellfishermen must carefully time when they plant the oyster seed so it grows to be one inch or more before mid-July. There is also a disease that affects quahog seed called QPX. This is a parasite that weakens the small quahogs just as they grow to be market size, about two inches. Neither blight is harmful to humans.

The change in regulations

approve or deny the source of shellfish seed or stock "sets in motion a management scheme for the transfer of seed into the town," said Harbormaster Don Beers.

To avoid bringing disease into Duxbury Bay, the shellfish advisory committee also recently voted unanimously not to allow shellfish seed or stock from sources south of Cape Cod Bay. Wellfleet is struggling with the quahog parasite.

The changes to the rules were recommended by a unanimous vote of the shellfish advisory committee. They were drafted with input from local shellfishermen and residents.

"Most of the changes came from the actual industry or the general public," said Beers. "We've known for quite a while we'd have to address some of these issues."

In related business, selectmen unanimously renewed licenses for two existing aquaculture grants for the next 10 years. George Shamma of King Phillips Path received a license extension for his two grants, one of one-and-a-half acres and one of 2.38 acres.

received a license extension for his shellfish grant south west of round flat.

Last month selectmen approved 10-year license extensions for four other shellfish grants.

In other business, selectmen:

□ Announced they will hold a fiscal planning session on Tuesday, May 24 at 7:30 p.m. at the Merry Room in the library. Town department heads will come prepared to speak on their budgets and the selectmen and town manager will discuss the town's budget and the possibility of a Proposition two-and-a-half override. They also plan to explain the different type of tax overrides. Duxbury has not had a general tax override since 1989.

□ Appointed Jack Hill and Jennifer Reed to the Council on Aging and reappointed Richard Whitney and Rev. Elizabeth Stevens to three year terms. They also accepted the resignation of Henry Milliken.

□ Went into executive session at the meeting's conclusion to discuss collective bargaining with town counsel